

Environmental Damage Prevention

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In the 1970s, the United States suffered an energy crisis. Unable to import enough oil to meet the country's demands, oil and gas prices skyrocketed. For the first time since the Great Depression, Americans realized what it meant to lack a necessary resource. The energy crisis triggered a brief period of intense research on alternative energy sources. However, after the oil embargo of the '70s ended, oil and gas prices returned to or dropped below their previous values, and the nation began to take advantage of cheaper resources. Americans had soon forgotten that just a short while ago, life had ground down to a crawl because of strained energy resources. The level of alternative energy and environmental management research declined.

As fuel prices dropped, the level of energy and material consumption per person rose. Very few paid attention to the environmental cost of our high energy usage; only the monetary cost mattered. Each year, roughly another 1.2% of our country's present population require their share of the Earth's energy and material resources. This increasing level of consumption has been the major cause of our nation's present environmental problems.

If our drive to consume more resources could be curbed, then environmental damage could be drastically lessened. However, since consumption is a defining factor of economic health and development to us, we would likely hesitate to decrease our level of consumption. It is difficult enough to get ourselves to realize the environmental costs of many economic activities. It will be even more difficult to tell ourselves to stop doing those activities. There must be a compromise between protecting the environment and maintaining a pleasing quality of life, and this is where research comes in.

What happened to all the intensive research done during the energy crisis? What triggered the decline in alternative energy and energy management research? After oil and gas prices returned to

normal, we no longer felt a need for this research. Going back 25 years in my time machine, I would encourage Americans to weigh their need to consume against an array of future environmental problems, and to maintain interest in alternative forms of energy and energy management. Finding environmentally-safe methods of maintaining an acceptable lifestyle will guard against rapid increases in environmental damage, and if our nation could have accepted and heeded this notion in the '70s, then we would have helped to lessen 25 years of environmental damage.

It would be wonderful if time machines existed. We would then have instant solutions to all our environmental problems. However, our only time machines run forward, and not backward. We cannot erase or alter our histories; the environmental management decisions we make today will be permanent. Since the '70s, we have greatly ignored this simple truth. Perhaps, as we prepare for the 21st century, we can be more mindful of our actions upon our future.

“In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.”

--Iroquois Confederation (18th Century)